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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 000614

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SUBJECT: VIEWS OF AND ABOUT FORMER PRESIDENT RAWLINGS

Classified By: Ambassador Pamela E. Bridgewater for reasons 1.4 d and e
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¶1. (C) Summary: On March 8, Ambassador attended a meeting with Ghanaian President Kufuor arranged by Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr., who was visiting Ghana for the 50th anniversary Jubilee and had also recently met with former President Rawlings. Jackson said Ghana's political polarization was hurting investment prospects. Kufuor said he reached out to Rawlings in the early years of his presidency but was later repeatedly rebuffed and criticized. Minister of National Security Poku told Jackson and the Ambassador that Rawlings suffers from clinical depression. In a separate meeting with members of a visiting Codel, Rawlings attacked Kufuor and the ruling NPP party. None of these meetings broke new ground in trying to narrow Ghana's political schism. End summary.

Polarization Affecting Investment Climate

¶2. (C) Reverend Jackson invited President John Kufuor to the annual PUSH conference in Chicago and said he would like to dedicate a session of the event to investing in Ghana. Jackson said he wanted to encourage the numerous talented Ghanaians in the diaspora to contribute to Ghana but was concerned that continued polarized politics between the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the main opposition National Democratic Party (NDC) could dampen investment prospects. Jackson told Kufuor he had visited former President J.J. Rawlings, founder of the NDC, on this trip. He asked Kufuor what could be done to reduce political tensions in Ghana, noting that he (Jackson) wished to be helpful.

Kufuor's Lament

¶3. (C) Kufuor appreciated Jackson's invitation and said he would have to review his busy travel schedule, which included upcoming trips to the UK, Portugal and Algeria. Kufuor promised to at least send a minister to represent him at the PUSH conference if he is unable to attend himself. When he first took office in 2001, he had hoped to maintain good relations with former President Rawlings, Kufuor stated. Kufuor said he went to Tema (a city on the outskirts of Accra) on Rawlings' invitation, despite the fact that protocol dictated Rawlings should have visited him in the Castle. At one point, Rawlings was denied access to his private boat for scuba diving near Akosombo (also site of a Presidential villa) because he did not have a permit to enter the premises, but when the GOG offered to facilitate and provide unimpeded access with an advance request, Rawlings did not follow up.

¶4. (C) Kufuor said he became "increasingly frustrated" with Rawlings over time. Rawlings was found holding meetings with

military officials in the barracks, which he was told was inappropriate. After this happened several times, Kufuor arranged a meeting with Rawlings and included the Asantehene, who reiterated to the former president the need to respect Kufuor as the sitting head of state. However, soon afterward, during a 2005 meeting in South Africa, Rawlings attacked Kufuor in front of the world media. The Ghanaian Embassy in the United States helped Rawlings replace some lost documents and pay some bills, which Rawlings followed with remarks to the press equating Kufuor to a notorious Ghanaian criminal. Kufuor said he decided to withdraw Rawlings' special travel courtesies because of his disrespect for the sitting president. Kufuor also told Jackson he was frustrated that Rawlings had rejected his recent invitation to attend 50th anniversary Jubilee events.

¶5. (C) Minister of National Security Francis Poku, who was the only other GOG official in the room during much of this conversation, inserted that Rawlings suffers from severe depression and takes regular anti-depressant medication. According to Poku, psychiatrists who have treated Rawlings view him like a child who wants his toy back (in this case the presidency). Rawlings still suffers from being abandoned at school as a child, he opined. Kufuor recalled an incident when, as President, Rawlings climbed a tree in the Castle and would not come down, reportedly in part the effect of his wife's refusal to medicate him.

Congressmen Meet Rawlings

¶6. (C) Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-Texas) and Congressman Bobby Rush (D-Illinois), both members of an 11-member Congressional delegation to Ghana's Jubilee, also

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sought and had a separate meeting with Rawlings. Rawlings told them his personal security was threatened and he questioned the results and transparency of the 2004 presidential and parliamentary election. He and several NDC leaders at the meeting claimed the party did not have an adequate opportunity to review the Millennium Challenge Account compact, which they feared could become a vehicle for corruption. They were angry the NDC was not adequately consulted about Jubilee planning and criticized the government for failing to punish the culprits of the 2002 murder of the Ya-Na Chief in Yendi, Northern Region. Rawlings and his colleagues also attacked the GOG's record on narcotics trafficking and its alleged ethnic (pro-Akan) bias in the military.

Comment

¶7. (C) Rawlings' personality has long had an unpredictable and boisterous edge, with a degree of paranoia perhaps not surprising for a leader who has survived numerous coup attempts. Rawlings is still mentally and physically active and continues to be a strong political force in Ghana. Kufuor and Poku are not impartial sources.

¶8. (C) Nonetheless, it is credible that Rawlings may have some kind of psychological/medical problems or be on psychotropic medication. After his meeting with Rawlings, Jackson reportedly described the former president as "delusional" and misguided in his obsession with past grievances. He told Kufuor that Rawlings appeared agitated during his meeting, his eyes bulging at times. In our meetings with Rawlings over the past several years, he has appeared agitated and emotionally volatile. At times he fades out, at times he booms forth dramatically. He fidgets and his hands tremble slightly. At times, he rambles in a disorganized manner or seems to want to talk ad naseum.

¶9. (C) We had not heard Kufuor run through his history of grievances against Rawlings in this fashion (although he has

made some of these complaints in media interviews). Rawlings has an equally long list of perceived sleights and insults from Kufuor, some of which he shared with the Codel. We believe it was constructive for our relationship-building that Rawlings, President of Ghana for almost two decades, got an opportunity to vent to prominent U.S. visitors during the Jubilee, even though he decided to boycott the celebrations. However, it is unfortunate that neither these meetings nor Kufuor's unusually frank discussion with Jackson revealed any new room for progress in bridging Ghana's political divide.

BRIDGEWATER